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TOURISM



CROSS-BORDER TOURIST ROUTES: THE POTENTIAL OF RUSSIA'S NORTH-WEST

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Developing cross-border tourist routes is an effective way of developing cooperation between border regions of Russia and the neighbouring countries. The author presents an approach that interprets cross-border tourist routes as an instrument for the conservation, reproduction, and promotion of natural, cultural, and historical potential and as a means to boost business activities in border regions.

This article summarises international practices and presents the theoretical and practical aspects of designing and developing transboundary tourist routes in the border regions of Russia's North-West. The author describes successful tourist routes within the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) cross-border cooperation programmes. Particular attention is paid to the routes in the Republic of Karelia — the Blue Road, the White Road, and the Mining Road. The article stresses the importance of developing transboundary tourist routes in the border regions of Russia's North-West. Designing and developing transboundary tourist routes is a step towards a transboundary tourist space. The author outlines avenues towards the development of transboundary tourist routes and transboundary tourism in the border regions of Russia's North-West.

Key words: cross-border tourist route, border regions, North-West Russia, European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) cross-border cooperation programmes, international project, Republic of Karelia

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The development of tourism and recreation in the borderlands and across the borders is an essential aspect of Russia's international cooperation. The processes of convergence and integration

of Russian north-western regions and Russia's neighbouring countries have been gaining pace in recent years. The development of cross-border tourist routes is one of the ways to diversify the tourism product; it is a step towards the formation of cross-border tourism. The development of cross-border tourist routes invigorates socio-economic activities in the sparse space of peripheral borderlands, acting as one of the tools for conserving, regenerating and mainstreaming the territories' cultural and historical potential.

Cross-border tourist routes: theoretical aspects

The borderlands of Russia's neighbouring countries delivering their tourist products to national and international tourist services markets are in many ways competing with one another. There is a certain comparability of the tourist product offerings due to the similarity of the natural conditions and connectedness of historical and cultural events. The organization of cross-border tourist routes and joint use of the borderlands' natural and cultural heritage can be one of the mechanisms to raise the attractiveness and strengthen the competitive advantage of territories on both sides of the border as it helps better expose the tourism and recreation potential of the borderlands.

Today, with well-informed tourists tending to self-arrange their trips [36], the development of tourist routes, including cross-border ones, is becoming an increasingly important activity; it helps channel tourist flows and invigorates economic activity in the borderlands of the countries along the route.

The development of cross-border tourism projects promotes integration in value chains (the governing principle of contemporary logistics), augments foreign investments in the tourist infrastructure, accelerates diffusion of innovations, and intensifies tourist flows [12], thus multiplying socio-economic effects in the borderlands.

Design and development of cross-border tourist routes is an innovative tool for exposing the territory's potential and drawing it into economic circulation [3; 6; 22; 23; 42].

A general definition of a ***cross-border tourist route***, based on Russian and foreign experience, is that of a route (with descriptions of natural and man-made attractions) designed by tourist companies or other organizations that connects territories of adjacent countries, usually with a thematic focus, which can be visited either individually or with tourist groups.

As opposed to the tourist routes within a border region of one country, cross-border tourist routes can be designed and developed provided there are good neighbourly relations between adjacent countries, explicit interest in cooperation, as well as demand for establishing a cross-border tourism space. Historical connections between nations and past cooperation experience acquire particular significance [37]. Furthermore, cross-border tourist routes help the neighbouring nations better understand each other, and contribute to conservation, reproduction and mainstreaming of the territory's assets, including its natural and cultural heritage, as well as human capital



[6]. On the other hand, potential positive effects of socio-economic development may come along with some antagonisms, caused, first of all, by the growing competition in the tourist market [12].

Exploiting the existing potential of borderlands, involving the economic one through the organization of cross-border tourist routes, depends on a number of geographic, geopolitical, economic and institutional factors. The first thing to consider is the availability and accessibility of unique tourist sites and attractions, both natural and man-made, on both sides of the border and the feasibility of combining them within one route. Infrastructural development, reconstruction of the existing tourist attractions and the construction of new attractions along a cross-border tourist route are essential for a better integration of border territories into the economy of border regions.

The quality of the transport infrastructure facilitating access to tourist attractions plays a major role in the development of cross-border tourist routes. One of the distinctive features of such tourist routes is their transboundariness. In this regard, it is crucial to develop frontier and customs infrastructure, including the construction of new border checkpoints and capacity-building of the existing ones. It is also necessary to simplify border-crossing procedures and formalities.

Speaking of the planning of cross-border tourist routes, researchers, in addition to existing infrastructural possibilities, often emphasize the importance of future development projects [12; 22]. One must also highlight the role of international projects in the design and development of cross-border tourist routes.

International experience of developing cross-border tourist routes

The global community has gained vast experience of designing, developing and improving cross-border tourist routes with different thematic profiles and transport options (pedestrian, bicycling, automobile, water, etc.). The development of cross-border tourist route networks results from enormous efforts taken by European countries to conserve and reproduce their natural, cultural and historical potential. The European Union pays a lot of attention to planning, development and improvement of cross-border tourist routes, the improvement of their infrastructure [8], a wider involvement of stakeholders, and better marketing of tourist routes. The demand for these activities remains high.

A representative example of thoroughness and cooperation is the EuroVelo cycle route network, which comprises 14 routes running for ca. 70,000 km, most of them already in operation (45,000 km). The network is managed by the European Cyclists' Federation, which guarantees high quality standards for cycling and navigation on the routes [9]. One part of the EuroVelo cycle route is particularly interesting; it is the trans-European "Iron Curtain Trail" route, which runs for over 10,400 km traversing 20 countries from the Barents Sea (Russia — Norway) to the Black Sea. The route is supported by the European Commission [11].



Counties of Central and Eastern Europe have a ramified network of Greenways — multifunctional routes along natural linear features, historical trade routes, rivers and railways. Greenways form the basis for the implementation of local social initiatives and projects aimed at nature and landscape protection, and conservation of cultural heritage. They are an important element of nature tourism and green traffic. Greenways are usually coordinated by local communities.

The existing network of Greenways in Central and Eastern Europe includes several cross-border routes, such as: Amber Trail from Budapest to Krakow (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary), Krakow-Moravia-Vienna Greenway (Poland, Czech Republic, Austria), Green Bicycle — East Carpathian Greenway (Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine), Peace Trail — Via Pacis Pannoniae (Serbia, Croatia) [10].

Thematic cross-border tourist routes form a separate category. The European Route of Brick Gothic (1,500 km long) is an example of a cross-border tourist route connecting cities and towns with medieval architecture in Denmark, Germany and Poland [5]. Another interesting case is the cross-border Shtetl route, familiarizing tourists with Jewish cultural heritage in eastern voivodeships of Poland and western regions of Belarus and Ukraine. This tourist route is funded through the 2007—2013 Poland-Belarus-Ukraine Cross-border Cooperation Programme of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument [7].

The longest planned cross-border tourist route so far, which is essentially a large-scale project, is the Silk Road, connecting the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Oceans, and traversing Europe, Asia and Africa. An online resource (interactive map) of the Silk Road route is now available, showing the World Cultural and Natural Heritage sites, intangible cultural heritage, crafts centres, and festival sites [12]. There are four places of interest in Russia on this map: the Golden Mountains of Altai, Uvs Nuur basin (shared with Mongolia), the Volga-Akhtuba Floodplain Biosphere Reserve (Volgograd Region), and the 18th century collection of maps of the Russian Empire (Moscow) [43]. Admittedly, much attention is now given to this project at the federal and the regional level in Russia: the Ministry of Culture adopted an action plan for 2013—2018 which includes the task to establish inter-regional historical and cultural tourist routes that include historical, cultural, archaeological heritage sites — the Silk Road [33].

Simultaneously, the Great Tea Road cross-border tourist route is being developed, which follows the route of Asia-Europe trade caravans of the 18th-19th centuries. The route connects territories of China, Mongolia and Russia. The importance of the project is evidenced by its inclusion in the Action Plan for the implementation of the Tourism Development Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020. Tourist event organised *en route* include excursions offered by tourist operators of Zabaikalsky Krai (region), the Republic of Buryatia, and the Irkutsk Region [25].

The experience of designing and developing tourist routes as a key component of the tourist product is extensively analysed in Russian research lit-

erature and resource books. On the other hand, studies on the design and development of cross-border tourist routes began to be published several decades ago, throwing light on the practical aspects of developing tourist routes [21; 22; 23], the specifics of the planning and design process [12; 24]. Many research works highlighted regional specificities of developing tourist routes.

Here are some examples of cross-border tourist routes that existed during the Soviet period. In the early 20th century a Blagoveshchensk non-governmental tourist organization, Russian Tourists Society, planned and organized routes which ran through Manchurian territory (on the Chinese side), aiming to strengthen the barrier function of the national border. The change in the USSR foreign policy in the 1980s brought to life a cross-border excursion route connecting cities on the opposite banks of the Amur River (Blagoveshchensk — Heihe), which later transformed into shopping tours [41].

The development of tourism and recreation in Russia's border regions have been integrating with those of the neighbouring countries, as seen in the increasing number of operating cross-border tourist routes. The Altai — the Golden Mountains cross-border extreme tourism route (automobile, ca. 5000 km) connecting Russia (Altai Republic, Altai Krai), Mongolia, China and Kazakhstan is a good example of such cross-border cooperation. Two international expeditions traveled the route in 2007 and 2012 [23].

However, the potential that Russian border regions offer for upgrading the existing cross-border tourist routes, which can benefit the socio-economic development of the country's remote regions and contribute to conservation, reproduction and promotion of the natural, historical and cultural heritage, is not used to the full. At the same time, businesses in the neighbouring countries demonstrate a tendency towards a more active utilisation of the advantages offered by their position on the border with Russia. The China-designed regular cross-border water route around Heixiazi (Bolshoi Ussuriysky) Island "The island of two rivers" (Fuyuan, 2013), part of it running through Russian waters, can be mentioned as an example [38]. In September 2016, the Ministry of Economic Development, Investment Policy and Foreign Relations of the Krasnoyarsk Region discussed the initiative of Finnish companies to set up a cross-border water tourism route through Russian internal waters from Krasnoyarsk to Finland (the Yenisey River — the Kara Sea — the White Sea — the Baltic Sea), and its implementation was scheduled for the summer of 2017 [40].

One must emphasize however that the planning and operation of cross-border tourist routes in the borderlands of Russia and its neighbor countries are subject to regulation and must fulfill the requirements of the border-crossing procedure. Besides, the configuration of tourist routes is defined by the cross-border transport-logistics framework (the term suggested by V.A. Andreev and S. Yu. Ostropol'tsev [13]), the arrangement of cross-border checkpoints on the national border [22], which work as a kind of 'braces' or stepping stones on cross-border tourist routes.

Development of cross-border tourist routes: the case of Northwest Russia

Traditional interactions between Russia and neighbouring countries have been re-enhanced in the Baltic Sea Region in the past several decades, and a new economic and cultural dialogue is currently being opened. Interaction and integration processes in the borderlands are quite visible in tourism and recreation [37]. The implementation of international projects aiming to promote co-operation between the borderlands through the development of cross-border tourist routes is one of the mechanisms for building collaboration networks between border regions of Russia and the neighbouring countries.

The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (2007—2013) is one of the most effective tools for the implementation of joint projects between Russia and the neighbouring EU countries. It gives priority to the intensification of cross-border cooperation between regions of adjacent countries. Border regions of Northwest Russia can participate in the following European Neighbourhood Instrument CBC programmes: Kolarctic (Sweden, Finland, Norway, Russia), Karelia (Finland, Russia), South-East Finland — Russia (Finland, Russia), Estonia — Latvia — Russia and Lithuania — Poland — Russia (with Kaliningrad Region). In 2007—2013, over 200 ENPI CBC joint projects aiming to promote small and medium-size enterprises, support local cultures and lifestyles, improve the well-being of people in the borderlands were implemented in the entire coverage area, including over 50 large infrastructure projects focusing on the environment, transport infrastructure and border infrastructure development [34].

Border regions of Northwest Russia have been very active in international projects, including the ones in tourism and recreation, and some of the projects were aimed at designing and developing cross-border tourist routes.

In the Lithuania — Poland — Russia ENPI CBC (2007—2013) programme, for instance, four of the 14 tourism-oriented projects had the design and development of new tourist routes as their objectives [22].

Speaking of the design of cross-border tourist routes one should remark that some of them reproduce trade and other historical routes that existed in the past, for instance, merchant Navinsky's trade route (Pskov Region, Russia — Belarus, ca. 45 km). It is a cross-border ecological water route, designed within the project "Cross-border wetlands conservation in the Polesie region of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine" of the Wetlands International Russian programme. The route is based on an ancient commercial thoroughfare "from the Varangians to the Greeks", which in the 9th-11th centuries linked Scandinavia and Old Russian principalities to the Mediterranean [16]. Another example of historical routes is the 'King's Road' cross-border route, connecting Sweden, Finland and Russia (Leningrad Region). In the 13th—16th centuries the royal road linked Swedish medieval towns and castles to Sweden's eastern fortified towns: Åbo (Turku), Tavastehus (Hämeenlinna), Olofsborg (Savonlinna) and Vyborg [20].



A success story in the organization of a cross-border tourist route in the Leningrad Region is Via Hanseatica (580 km) project, implemented within Estonia — Latvia — Russia ENPI CBC programme 2007—2013 (total budget 1.8 mln. euro). The St. Petersburg — Riga route linked the borderlands of Russia, Estonia and Latvia through stepping stones of sights along the ancient Hanseatic road. The Leningrad Region part of the route runs through the following sights: Ivangorod fortress, post station Kipen, Petrovitsky relic boulder, Koporye fortress, Roerich's estate in Izvara, Old Russian kurgans in the village of Kalitino, etc. [39]. The Via Hanseatica project of the Estonia — Latvia — Russia ENPI CBC programme was acclaimed as one the Programme's best tourism-oriented projects.

Another increasingly important activity is the organization of new tourist routes traversing several neighbouring countries. For instance, the international project Baltic Culture and Tourism Route Fortresses (INTERREG-III-B, 2005—2007) has launched a cross-border tourist route incorporating fortification structures in four countries: Germany, Poland, Lithuania and Russia (Kaliningrad Region) [2]. An interesting case of combining cultural, historical, ethnic, artisan and industrial attractions of the borderlands of the Leningrad and Pskov Regions of Russia, Estonia and Latvia is the "Green Heritage Routes" designed within the project "Regeneration of parks as integral parts of historical heritage" № ELRII-404 of Estonia — Latvia — Russia ENPI CBC programme. The initiative to design and organize the route was put forward by the Tourism Association of Vidzeme (a historical and cultural region of Latvia) together with the Leningrad Region Museum Agency, Rāpina Municipality Government (Estonia) and Gulbene Municipality (Latvia). The routes are a kind of a 'construction kit' for planning one's own journey. Tourist companies also offer their services for servicing the routes [35].

Reclamation, reconstruction and restoration of the existing natural and man-made attractions along cross-border tourist routes is an important activity. An example is preparation of technical documentation for the construction of a Viking village within the international project 2007/140—475 "Lagoons as cultural and historical crossroads of peoples in South-Eastern Baltic area" (2007—2009) and further renovation of the open-air museum of Vikings "Ancient Sambia" within a follow-up project "Lagoons as crossroads for tourism and interactions of peoples of South-East Baltic: from the history to present — CROSSROADS 2.0" (Kaliningrad Region) [31]. The opening and promotion of the Tulmozero Ore Park in the premises of the old Tulmozersky iron smelter (18th c.) exemplifies a project in which the previously idle potential of the Republic of Karelia was used to attract tourists [29; 42]. Cross-border tourist routes running through the territory of Russian Karelia will be presented in more detail in the next section of this paper.

Speaking of the development of cross-border tourist routes one must mention a wide spectrum of outbound tours to the neighbouring countries offered by tourist companies in border regions of Northwest Russia. The majority of these tours are guided bus tours of varying duration, taking tourists to cultural, historical and natural attractions in other countries. However, these tours cannot be regarded as cross-border tourist routes since they make



no use of the tourism and recreation potential of Northwest Russian borderlands. In this sense, a noteworthy example is cross-border cruises connecting coastal cities of the Baltic Sea countries.

The relevance of developing cross-border tourist routes for the borderlands of Northwest Russia is corroborated by the good practices of their design within international projects, as well as by currently developed new cross-border routes. Thus, Polish and the Kaliningrad Region tour operators are developing new cross-border tourist routes, such as a cycling route through border districts of the Kaliningrad Region and Polish borderlands. The route is primarily designed for tourists from Russia and Scandinavia. The organizers have applied for funding from the Russia — Poland Cross-border Cooperation programme until 2020 (61.3 million euros, including 41.3 million euros of EU funding, and 20 million euros of Russian funding) [17]. In the middle of 2016 an agreement was reached about designing the Russian-Belarusian eco-tourism route “Through the wildernesses of the Lakeland” (ca. 500 km), traversing the Pskov and Smolensk Regions of Russia, Vitebsk and Minsk Regions of Belarus, and visiting several protected areas (Smolensk Lakeland, Sebezhsky, Braslav Lakes, Narochansky national parks, and Berezinsky biosphere reserve) [15]. A promising line for the development of cross-border cooperation in the Murmansk Region is a cross-border tourist route visiting protected areas in the borderlands of Finland, Norway and Russia (Murmansk Region, Pasvik Nature Reserve).

Businesses in adjacent countries have expressed their interest in the tourist industry. In June 2016, Estonian specialists presented to the St. Petersburg tourist business a new cross-border route “Struve Arc”, embracing the remaining 34 points of the Struve Geodetic Arc in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine (chain of survey triangulations carried out by Russian astronomer F. Struve in 1816—1855 rr., and included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005). In September 2016, a competition was announced for the best logo for the “Struve Arc” route; souvenirs, tourist maps and route navigation are now being developed [32]. Hurtigruten, a Norwegian cruise company is planning to arrange one-day Kirkenes — Murmansk tours, using the advantage of 72 hours visa free regime for tourists. [27].

Cross-border tourist routes in the Republic of Karelia

Several cross-border tourist routes exposing possibilities of utilizing the territory’s tourism and recreation potential in economic activities have been designed in the Republic of Karelia within international projects and are now operating.

One of the examples is the *international tourist route “Blue Road”* (over 2000 km), which traverses Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The road runs along historical waterways from the Norwegian town of Nesna via the Republic of Karelia (Petrozavodsk — Medvezhjegorsk — Pudozh) to the Arkhangelsk Region (Fig 1.).

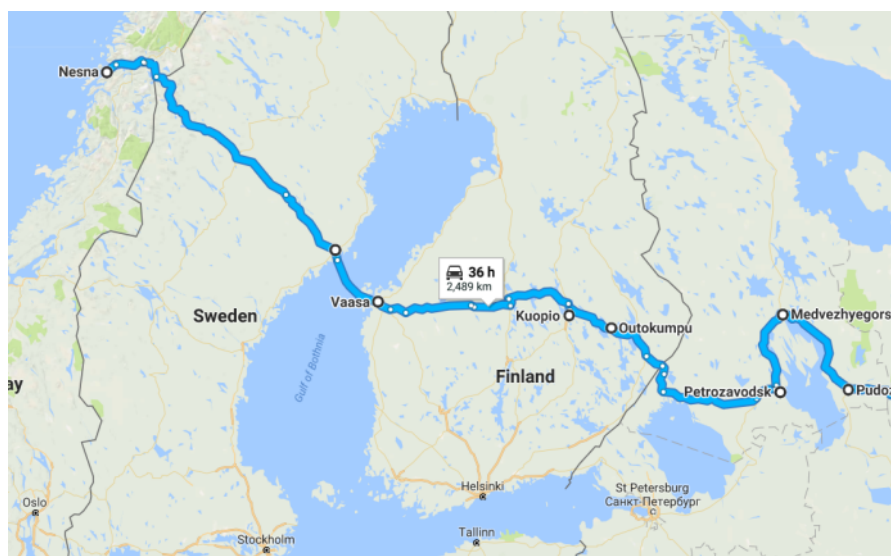


Fig 1. International tourist route Blue Road

Compiled by the authors based on [19].

The Blue Road Association established in 1962 (the respective regional NGO in the Republic of Karelia was founded in 1990) plays a special role in developing and promoting the route, its historical, cultural and natural heritage. The development of the international route Blue Road in the Republic of Karelia commenced in 1992. Many other international projects, including the ones aimed at the development of new cross-border tourist routes, build on the experience of the Blue Road. For instance, proposals for the development of tourism were worked out within the international project “Historical, cultural and natural sights along the international route Blue Road in the Republic of Karelia” (1999—2001) implemented under the umbrella of the project “KASPNET: Karelian-Atlantic spatial development network” (Interreg II C), which comprised over 40 projects focused on spatial planning of the international route Blue Road [18]. The project surveyed and identified 38 natural and cultural heritage sites along the Blue Road (including the Ruskeala Mining Park), and published a catalogue of major tourist attractions along the route [14]. In 2007, the guidebook “The museums and cultural sights on the international route “Blue Road” in Republic of Karelia” [26] in the Russian and English languages was produced within the international project implemented by museums of Västerbotten County (Sweden) and the Republic of Karelia (Russia). The international project “Eco-efficient tourism” (Karelia ENPI CBC programme, total budget 590,000 euros) was implemented in 2012—2014 and aimed at making Euregio Karelia more attractive for tourists by improving the quality of services provided to tourists on both sides of the border. The project resulted, among other things, in building several tourist stopovers along the Blue Road and publication of the guidebook “Eco-efficient technologies along the Blue Road” [45].



The Mining Road cross-border tourist route (ca. 400 km) designed within the international project KA334 “Mining Road” of the Karelia ENPI CBC Programme (2012—2014, total budget 800,000 euro) has assembled the geological and mining heritage along the Blue Road. This cross-border tourist route linked former mining sites and geological nature monuments in the south of Russian Karelia with old mines, smelters and operating mines in Eastern Finland (Petrozavodsk — Outokumpu). The route includes the Tulmozero Ore Park, Kiitelä garnet field (the only deposit with jewelry-grade garnets in Russia), Ruskeala Mining Park on the Russian side and Stone Centre in Juuka, mining museums in Lohja and Outokumpu on the Finnish side (altogether some 20 tourist sites related to the geological and mining history of the region) [29; 42]. The *de facto* opening of the “Mining Road” was probably a pilot tour organized by the Karelika tour company in August 2014.

The project envisaged the reconstruction of some sites along the route. One of the main outputs of the project implementation in Russian Karelia is a new tourist attraction — Tulmozero Ore Park, occupying 3 ha (opened on 03.08.2014) with 8 ha surroundings having areas for excursions and recreation, including the ruins of the middle 18th century Tulmozersky Ironworks. The Tulmozero Ore Park can be visited with guided groups or on one’s own (Table 1, [28]). The Tulmozero Park is a promising tourist sight with approximately 20—30 thousand tourists visiting it annually.

Table 1

The number of visitors to the Tulmozero Ore Park

	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of visitors of the Tulmozero Ore Park, people	1,030	1,580	2,300	2,380

The project produced a set of GPS-assisted excursions (audio guides) facilitating unaccompanied visits to attractions along the route, including the Petrozavodsk — Kolatselga trip, excursions of the Tulmozero Ore Park and Ruskeala Mining Park (Republic of Karelia), former Möhkö Ironworks, Outokumpu Mine and Mining Museum, and a walk around Puijo hill in Kuopio (Finland). Another output was 3D virtual excursions of the Precambrian Geology Museum at the Institute of Geology of the Karelian Research Centre RAS and the Republic of Karelia National Museum, the Village of Kolatselga, Tulmozero Ore Park and Ruskeala Mining Park, Möhkö Ironworks Museum, and Outokumpu Mine Museum [29]. Manuals for tour guides were prepared in Russian and English, tour guides were offered training for working at the Tulmozero Ore Park [42].

The Ruskeala Mining Park experienced a sharp growth of the number of visitors in 2006—2016 (40-fold, Fig 2) The growth resulted from, many interlinked factors: a wider service offer in all seasons, modernization of tourist infrastructure, and the inclusion of the park in the Mining Road cross-border tourist route [28].

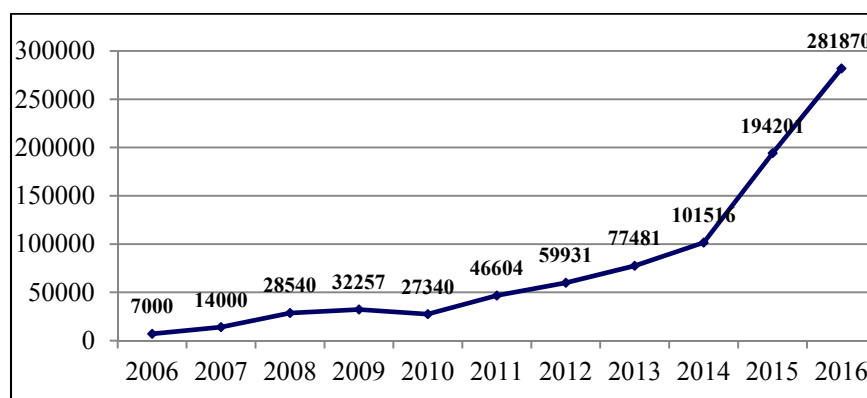


Fig. 2. Number of visitors to the Ruskeala Mining Park, 2006—2016, people

Given numerous possibilities offered by modern information technology, the Republic of Karelia is re-directing tourist flows from traditional destinations to unique tourist sites, such as the Ruskeala Mining Park.

The Mining Road project (KA334) of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument's Karelia Cross-border Cooperation Programme (Karelia ENPI CBC) was recognized as one of the Programme's best tourism-oriented projects [29].

Another example is the *White Road cross-border tourist route*, which connects Northern Finland and northern districts of the Republic of Karelia via the ancient trade route from the White Sea region to the Baltic. The route was designed within the international project KA 325 "White Road — cross-border tourism development in Northern Finland and the Republic of Karelia" (Karelia ENPI CBC Programme, 2012—2014, euro 734 000). The project aimed to develop tourism in northern parts of the Republic of Karelia, provide information and training support to tourist businesses, share experiences and expertise among tourist businesses, investors and educators in the two countries. An important output of this project was the opening of six tourist information centres in districts of the Republic of Karelia [30].

One more route via the Republic of Karelia is to be mentioned here — the *cross-border water route "Northern Lights"* designed in 1997 to promote the cultural heritage of Norway and Northwest Russia. Initiated by Norway, this route around Scandinavia was on the same year commended by the European Council, whose special resolution declared it to be essential for promoting pan-European cultural identity. Among the outputs of the project one should mention the website of the Northern Lights Route (in English) brochures and other materials about cultural and historical places (Kizhi and Valaam for Russian Karelia) published in English and Norwegian. The international sailing ships festival "Blue Onego — 2000" in the Republic of Karelia was a pilot project for the same route [44]. No updates are now found on the development of this route.



Recapitulating on the practical significance of cross-border tourist routes for the Republic of Karelia one should emphasize their contribution to the development of the existing (Ruskeala Mining Park) and new tourist destinations (Tulmozero Ore Park) in the region. Cross-border tourist routes facilitate the opening of new tourist information centres (6), generate new tourist products (for unguided tourists, too), stimulate the construction of new tourist attractions and tourism infrastructure along the routes. The Blue Road, White Road, Mining Road cross-border routes developed within international projects serve as economic and cultural bridges between Northern Europe and inland Russia, helping to activate the socio-economic life of the participating communities. They contribute to conservation, mainstreaming and regeneration of the natural, historical and cultural potential of the Republic of Karelia. Furthermore, the designing and development of these routes help intensify the processes of convergence and integration between border regions on the different sides of the border, and generate the premises for implementation of new tourism-oriented international projects.

One of the key characteristic features of cross-border tourist routes is their longevity (sustainability), its indicators being an increase in the number of visitors at sights and facilities along the route, the number of tours of the routes organized by tourist companies, promotion of the route in national and international tourist services markets, coupling and integration with other routes, etc. It appears to be rather problematic to accurately quantify the number of tourists who have used this or that route since both Russian and foreign tourists (provided that they have passed all the relevant border and customs formalities) can freely enter any part of a route. Current trends in tourism development — increasing numbers of self-organized tourists, associated with easy access to various information sources, as well as the international practice of visiting only one part of the route should also be taken into account. Changes in the number of visitors at tourist attractions and tourist infrastructure along the routes on both sides of the border, as well as the number of website visitors can give some statistic information in addition to the data provided by tourist industry organisations. More detailed estimation would require additional surveys using sociological methods.

Yet, the development of the Blue Road cross-border route is a success story, an example of fulfilling the sustainability requirement by an international project.

Conclusions

Possibilities of organizing cross-border tourist routes reflect the unique potential of the borderlands of Northwest Russia, highlighting their competitive advantages compared to inland regions of the country.

Cross-border tourist routes designed within international projects in the border regions of Northwest Russia have brought positive changes to the in-

frastructural development of these regions, invigorated business life along the routes, contributed to conservation and reproduction of the natural, historical and cultural potential, promoted the tourist appeal of the territories, augmented the inbound tourist traffic to unique destinations, etc.

Alongside positive effects of cross-border tourist routes on the development of borderlands and shaping of the region's transboundary tourism one should emphasize challenges involved in their design and further development. The analysis of theoretical and practical aspects of designing cross-border tourist routes has revealed some hindrances existing in Northwest Russian borderlands: there is a difference in the level of infrastructure development in borderlands; the configuration of the routes is pre-determined by border checkpoints; customs and border-crossing formalities have an impact on the experience tourists get from the route, etc.

Therefore, the following priority measures should be taken for the development of cross-border tourism in general and cross-border tourist routes in particular:

- *enhancement of transport infrastructure*, including transport accessibility of sites having natural, historical and cultural heritage;
- *enhancement of roadside infrastructure and facilities along the route*, including stopover sites and weather shelters, gas stations, cafes, shops, tourist offices, public toilets, etc.
- *development of waterside infrastructure*, including boat and yacht mooring facilities, stopover sites and weather shelters, etc.
- *enhancement of border-crossing and customs infrastructure*, including opening of new checkpoints, simplification of visa formalities;
- *integrated development of the territory for tourism and recreation*;
- *making tourist routes equally accessible for all categories of visitors*, including people with special needs;
- *facilitation of easier navigation of tourist routes*, including signage;
- *better provision of information for tourists*, including reader signs, audio guides, etc.;
- *implementation of international and research projects* designed to identify the potential of the borderlands of adjacent countries, and building cross-border networks of stakeholders;
- *marketing*, production and development of websites, information materials in several languages;
- *etc.*

Another important dimension of the development of cross-border tourist routes is the creation of institutional conditions and increasing the capacity of tourist companies along the route, including licensing and accreditation of companies and tour guides, etc. [22].

To sum up, it is competitive transport logistics and tourist infrastructure that play a decisive role in designing and operating cross-border tourist routes, in exploiting and increasing tourism and recreation potential of border territories.

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